Mockingjay: Origin
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Mockingjay: Origin

by SolarisLupi

Summary

Katniss Everdeen was exactly four years old when her Quirk manifested.

She was exactly four years and two days old when she learned to hate it.

Or the tale of how Katniss Everdeen, American Pro Hero, burned a Phoenix and Mockingjay rose from her ashes.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Katniss Everdeen was exactly four years old when her Quirk manifested.

She was exactly four years and two days old when she learned to hate it.

That day, the second time she used Mockery, her little sister had been crying. Mom was in one of her despondent moods, sitting by the windowsill and staring vacantly outside with unkempt blonde hair. Dad had died a months ago, right before Prim was born. Katniss did not know what ‘death’ was yet, but she knew it meant that someone left and did not come back.

Mom was distant. Prim was crying. Dad was not here. He was ‘dead’. Katniss thought about what he would do if he was here and patted Prim on her wispy blonde head.

Katniss spoke in her father's voice. "Don't cry, little duck. I'm here."

Prim stopped crying and giggled.

Mom slapped Katniss and called her a monster.

Mockery let Katniss speak with the voice of anyone she heard. She could copy the voice of her father, her mother, Prim, the cashier at the grocery store, the anchor she saw on the news before there was not enough money to keep the electricity on. Overuse left her unable to speak for a day, but that was not why Katniss hated it.

Because Mockery did not let her copy the *emotions* behind the voices. Even at the ripe old age of four, Katniss was not an emotional girl. She was not an optimistic one. So when she attempted to speak with the cheery tone of her father, it came out stilted, flat, and *dead*. Negative emotions were so much easier to convey, so when Katniss was away on a school trip and returned home, only to find Prim had been forced to feed herself for the past few days, she screamed at Mom. She screamed at Mom with the voice of her father, her anger releasing as a deep, furious bellow.

Mom called her a devil for speaking with the voices of the dead.

She did not kick Katniss out, but it did not matter that they lived in the same house.

Her mother was distant, lost in grief for their father.

She might as well not have been there at all.

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Katniss was the ripe old age of nine. She went to school, and did the shopping, and took care of Prim. She used the old bow of her father to hunt and sold the illegal game she caught for some money. It barely kept them afloat, but it was just enough to keep some food in the fridge. It was not enough to keep the lights on and the water running.

Prim's Quirk helped with that. Dad could use a bow and hit his target every time. Their mother used to encourage plants to grow faster before Dad died. Katniss had little time for school, but she knew Prim did *something* to target the best genes in plants, making them grow faster and stronger and better tasting than others. It was not fast or strong enough to be useful in any combat scenario, but it allowed them to have fresh fruit and vegetables to sell even during the coldest of winters.

Katniss wished her Quirk was that useful. She wished she had Dad's targeting abilities so she would never miss a shot. She wished she had her mother's ability to make things grow. Instead she had Mockery, and all the pain it brought those around her.

Except Prim.

When their mother was far enough away, or so deep in her mind she would not notice them, Prim would ask to hear Dad's voice. After he had died, their mother had taken all the videos of him. Katniss did not know whether she had locked them away or destroyed them. So she talked to Prim with Dad's voice so Prim would not forget him.

It was the closest she ever got to getting a cheerful voice right.

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When Katniss was twelve years old, she almost lost Prim.

The villain attack came out of nowhere. Two had robbed a bank and were speeding through the city, driving onto sidewalks and forcing bystanders to dive out of the way. Katniss and Prim were one of those unlucky people, heading home after selling Prim's vegetables on the corner.

The screech of an engine was the only warning Katniss got before a car hurtled towards her and Prim. She grabbed her sister's arm, leg muscles screaming, but she knew she would not get them both out of the way in time—

Air rushed around her and she and Prim were on the other side of the street. The car hurtled harmlessly by, screeching around a corner. Katniss stared at the big hand on her shoulder and looked up at the even bigger costumed man holding Prim. She amended her previous thought. The man was not big. He was *very* big. His stature, his muscles, even his hair. He looked like the stereotypical American superhero— a celebrity more than a savior— and Katniss felt her lips dip in displeasure. It vanished when he spoke.

"Are you alright?"

Katniss was good at reading voices. She could tell when someone was lying, when they were being fake, when they were putting on a show. This man— this *Hero*— was not like that. When he asked, he was genuine. He *cared.*

He was the first adult that seemed to since Dad died.

Overwhelmed by that care, Katniss merely pulled Prim closer to her and nodded.

The Hero patted Katniss on the head. "Hurry home, young ones."

He chased after the villains before Katniss could speak. What she wanted to say— *Thank you. Who are you?* ***Don't leave***— remained unspoken. Katniss took Prim and hurried home. The next day, she used the library to research the Hero. She learned he was called 'All Might' and he was from Japan. He was a real Hero, there to save lives and not there for the fame like so many others.

Real Heroes helped people. They also had cars and clothes and money.

It was not the most selfless motivation, but it was a practical one. Katniss should be too young to think about financial security, but when no one else would, it was up to her. She hated her Quirk, but she had it. She was not Quirkless, so she could apply to a Hero school. She had her bow and her wits and her determination. Perhaps they could be useful for more than just hunting illegal game.

I'm going to be a Pro Hero.

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When Katniss was thirteen years old, she met a drunk man.

She'd been out running through the dirty streets of the city, as she did every night since she decided she would become a hero. Hopes and dreams did not become reality unless worked for, so she did what she could to train herself in preparation for the acceptance exam.

When she met the drunk man, he fell down some stairs and onto his face, a bottle of whiskey in his hand. Katniss looked down at the ragged, unkempt man who smelled of alcohol and wrinkled her nose. She stepped past him to keep running and stopped. Heroes helped people, even hopeless drunkards. If she wanted to be a hero— to provide Prim with the stability she deserved— she needed to step up.

She planted on a smile and knelt next to the drunk man. “Do you need help?”

Bloodshot eyes looked up at her and the man burst into laughter. “When you offer your help you should look a little less angry, kid.”

Katniss was pretty sure that was what he said, anyway. It came out more like gibberish. She wrinkled her nose, tempted to leave, but that was not what heroes should do. She had to try to be a hero, because she could not sell illegal game forever.

“At least I’m helping.” She stubbornly grasped the man’s arm and pulled at him. “Now get up. Where’s your house?”

The drunkard staggered to his feet and swayed, leaning heavily on her. “Why you so insistent, kid?” he mumbled. “You’re getting nothin’ outta this.”

Katniss set her jaw as she pulled him along. “I must be a hero, and heroes help people in need.”

The drunkard snorted. “You quote that from a book? You might want to work on your people skills. You sound pissy. Sooooo unapproachable, *hic*.”

Katniss ground her teeth. “It doesn’t matter what I sound like. I will be a hero.”

He just laughed at her. Katniss was sorely tempted to drop him but she persevered. Being a hero meant dealing with people like him, so she would practice until she did not care anymore. For Prim.

She eventually got an address out of the stupid drunk and sent him on his way. He may be drunk, but he had a wallet and enough money to pay for a taxi.

She went home and did not expect to see him again, but the next night he was back, and considerably less drunk than before. He waited at the steps he had fallen down and grinned as she ran up.

“Hey, kid. You’re back. I was hoping you’d come around here again.”

“What do you want?” Katniss demanded.

The drunkard stood up and brushed the dirt off his pants. Katniss noticed he was wearing a tacky cowboy outfit straight out of a Western. It was better than the dirty rags he had been wearing before, but not by much. The brown fabric was faded and she could see a stain on his shirt.

“I wanted to thank you for helping me instead of robbing me blind. Not everyone would stop to help a hopeless drunk.”

“You’re welcome.” Katniss said curtly and made to continue on her run.

“You said you wanted to be a hero, right?” the drunkard asked, stopping her in place. At her stiff nod, he smirked. “Well, you did good at the whole helping part. But that attitude of yours will get you nowhere. The public won’t accept you if you’re so unapproachable as a hero.”

Anger bubbled in Katniss’s stomach, slow and hot like coals. “How would *you* know anything about being a hero?”

He tipped his stupid cowboy hat back. “I *was* one, kiddo.” He stood and bowed to her with a mocking air. “Name’s Haymitch Abernathy and I’d like to teach you a thing or two about being a

hero."

"Katniss Everdeen." She introduced herself coolly. "And why would you help me? What do you want in exchange?" She knew better than to think his lessons would be free. She wasn't stupid.

Haymitch smirked, tipping his head as he studied her. "I don't want nothing from you. I got enough money for life now, but I was in your position once. Pardon me for wanting to help another poor kid."

Katniss did not believe him. He was probably lying and seeking to exploit her in some way. But she thought of Prim and decided if Haymitch tried anything, she could always shoot him with an arrow.

She never had to shoot him.

Haymitch was a drunk. He was often too drunk to teach her anything. But when he was as close to sober as he could be, he dedicated himself to being her teacher.

She guessed it was because he was lonely, or he was tired of being drunk all the time, or he realized he was wasting away and she was his desperate attempt to prove to himself his life still had meaning. No matter his motives, she learned from him.

She learned he was Ricochet, the Slingback Hero, a formerly young hero with a Quirk that allowed him to Deflect anything that came his way. Bullets, cars, even smoke flicked away from him with double the force, as if they were repelled by his aura alone. He had been a rising star, shooting through the ranks faster than his quick-draw. Many claimed he would be in the Top Ten before he hit twenty-five. Money, fame, power, sponsorships, he had it all.

It had all come crashing down when he accidentally deflected a villain's axe back at her, cutting her in half.

The backlash was immediate, and his sponsors fled faster than they had come. Haymitch fell from grace in an instant and plummeted even deeper into alcoholism. He became a drunkard, but he was smarter than he let on, and ensured his future was secure before it all went to hell. He quit being a hero and relied on the lifetime deals from his sponsorships to get by, with those sponsors cursing themselves for agreeing to the deals that gave him a portion of their revenue.

It was those lessons that Haymitch taught Katniss. He taught her business and politics. He taught her how to talk to people— well, he *tried*, at least. In place of being approachable, he taught her how to create an image of aloof mysteriousness that the public would eat up. He taught her how to be a mostly underground hero but still get enough spotlight for reliable income. He taught her how to fight, how to talk, how to exploit the system so if it screwed her over, she could screw it over twice as hard.

It was the most any adult had ever invested themselves in her life.

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When Katniss was fourteen years old, she applied for the prestigious Appalachia Hero Academy. She took the practical exam at fifteen and passed with flying colors because robots stood no chance against well-placed arrows.

She did not have enough money to pay to get in.

But she could afford a far smaller school called Cole Academy, which acted more as a public

school than a private one. No need to pay to get in. They saw her practical score and accepted her immediately, not caring that her fighting style had nothing to do with her Quirk. She was among the poorest students there.

Her uniform— because Cole may be poor but it wanted to pretend it had some prestige— was from the bargain bin and had a stain on its shoulder. Her costume was a shoddy black skintight suit whose only benefit was that it let her keep her mobility. Even among the poorest, she was poor, and she heard a couple girls stifle their laughter as she emerged in her 'costume' for the first time.

"Nice bow." a male voice said.

Katniss pressed her lips together and turned, a scathing retort on her lips. She noticed the crossbow on her classmate's shoulder first and glanced at his face. His coloring was similar to hers, though his expression was less stern. He grinned.

"I hope I didn't sound sarcastic there. That really is a nice bow."

"My father made it." Katniss said, because she felt like she was supposed to say something.

The boy nodded and held out a hand. "I'm Gale. I have an air-manipulating Quirk but I like using a crossbow."

Katniss hesitantly shook the offered hand. "Katniss. I prefer using my bow as well."

"I never thought I'd meet another modern-day Robin Hood." Gale said casually.

"I guess we'll have to stick together then." Katniss replied dryly, not really meaning it.

Gale thought she meant it.

They somehow became friends.

Gale learned about her mother, Prim, Prim's stupid and annoying stray cat, and Katniss's Quirk. Katniss learned Gale had many siblings, his father was dead, and he wanted to be a hero, but he hated the system. He hated how many heroes were celebrities more than heroes, how they used their status for fame and riches. When Katniss admitted she wanted to be a hero for money, he waved her off.

"You're different. You want financial security. But these guys? They're disgusting. They spend more time filming for hair spray commercials than they do fighting villains. They're *performers and celebrities*, not heroes. Makes me wish someone would punish them."

Katniss agreed.

The year passed by peacefully. Cole was a small school, so not much happened. Katniss did not particularly care. She was here to be a hero, not the center of attention. Let Appalachia attract all the press and glory. The less people knew about her, the better.

Prim's vegetables were selling well, and their mother had pulled herself together enough to help bring in some money. Katniss was on her way to become a hero and ensure they could have the lights on and the water running. She had a friend at her side, and she could actually see herself with a future.

Things were finally looking up.

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Katniss was sixteen years old when she was kidnapped.

She had been walking home from Cole like she did every day when a van pulled up beside her. A prick was the only warning she got before she blacked out, waking in a room. Confused voices overwhelmed her but her Quirk picked each one up, filing them away for later use.

The lights flicked on and a few people screamed. Katniss was not one of them. Instead she observed, and listened, and planned. They were in a forest, but the leaves were as unnatural as the light above them. She saw the slight curve of the visible wall and realized they were inside a giant arena. She noted the cache of weapons near the wall, among them, a bow and quiver. She stood in place and stared at the masked, cloaked figures far above them— two stories, in fact— seated in a balcony that went far out of sight as a thin electronic force field separated them from the children. The masks were a blank white, except for one, which had a red rose below its eye.

“Welcome welcome welcome to the twentieth annual Quirk Games!” a cheerful female voice said, and Katniss committed it to memory. “May the odds be ever in your favor.”

Someone threw something at the masked people but it fizzled into nothing as a force field flickered.

“What the fuck is this?” a boy— likely the thrower— shouted. “Why are we here?”

“Language.” the woman chided as if she were not a mask-wearing kidnapper. “President Snow was about to explain if you had a little patience—”

“That’s enough.” the rose-masked man said.

His voice made Katniss’s skin crawl. Her throat itched like it had been filled with roses and her mouth tinged with the taste of blood. The rose masked man— Snow— seemed to look her way, but it was impossible to tell with that mask on.

“Quite simply, young Cato, you are here to take part in our Quirk Games; an arena fight in which you going to fight to the death for our entertainment.”

He spoke gently, as if his words were nothing more than confirmation they would be playing a soccer game. Wails and screams assaulted Katniss’s ears but she remained silent.

“Like hell we are!” a boy shouted.

“What if we refuse?” a burly boy demanded.

Snow chuckled. “Then you will face them.”

The wall pulled back to reveal cages filled with monsters. Misshapen creatures of fur, flesh, teeth, and claws leered at the tributes from the shadows, eyes glowing red. They snapped at the bars of the cage, jaws dripping with saliva, and a few tributes shrank back. A small dark-skinned girl pressed herself against Katniss’s side. She wrapped her arm around her, keeping her close.

“You all have a choice.” Snow said with the pleasant calm of someone commenting on the weather. “You may die by each other’s hands, or you may be slowly and painfully torn apart by our Muttations. Again, the choice is *all yours*. You have five minutes.”

The lights in the balcony went out, hiding the onlookers from sight. Twenty-four children ranging

from twelve to seventeen stared at one another. The bulky boy— Cato— took a step backwards towards the weapon cache. The other tributes tensed.

A golden-haired boy with tanned skin held up a cautionary hand. “Let’s not be reckless. If we work together, we can beat them, or last until the Pro Heroes show up.”

“Yeah right.” a blond girl snapped. “You heard them. This is the twentieth Games. They’ve done this *twenty* times!”

The golden-haired boy gritted his teeth— perfect, shiny, had he ever suffered a day in his life?

“I don’t care. I’m not going to kill anyone like they want.”

His green eyes flicked to the small girl at Katniss’s side before locking with Katniss’s grey. She did not consciously act. She merely *moved*, shifting closer to him and the safety that radiated from his smile and pulling the little girl with her—

Cato was already moving, and the blond girl instantly fell to his blade. A cannon *boomed* and the other tributes burst into motion, some running while others lunged for the weapon pile. Katniss’s eyes locked on the bow but she dare not approach. She picked up the girl and took off into the arena.

“You want the bow.” the girl blurted. Her gaze flicked to the boy. “You want the trident.”

“Our lives are more important.” Katniss said as screams rang out behind her.

The girl looked back and her eyes went wide.

Katniss pressed her head into her shoulder. “Don’t look.”

They kept running until the screams faded. Katniss slowed down first, panting, while the boy looked barely winded. He held out his arms but Rue tapped Katniss.

“I can walk now.”

Katniss reluctantly put her down and they caught her breath.

The boy dragged a hair through his tousled locks and swore like a sailor. “I can’t believe they did that. We could have fought our captors.”

“Maybe one of them has a Quirk that makes people violent?” Katniss offered for the little girl’s benefit, because she knew better.

The boy grimaced. “Then why weren’t we affected?”

Katniss could think of no answer. “I don’t know.”

They stood awkwardly for a moment and stared at one another.

The boy cleared his throat. “Er, introductions.”

“Right, we should introduce ourselves.” Katniss echoed.

“Right.”

They kept staring at each other. Katniss’s fingers tingled, and she wondered if she had misjudged

the safety in his voice.

"...We're so hopeless." The boy groaned in exasperation and put on a smile that would make many swoon. Katniss was not one a swooner. "I'm Finnick Odair. My Quirk is Hydrokinesis. I go to Golden Hero Academy in California."

She tentatively shook his hand. "Katniss Everdeen. I shoot things. Cole Academy."

"Rue." the small girl beside her whispered. Her eyes were filled with tears. "Are you heroes?"

Katniss saw Prim in her place, and her smile was natural. "Yes."

Rue bit her lip. "Daddy says I'm not supposed to show strangers my Quirk but you're heroes…" She held out her hands, which glowed blue. The bow, quiver, and arrows appeared in her palms and she held them out shyly. "I can teleport objects to me that people want."

The possibilities of such a power raced through Katniss's head as she struggled to school her expression.

"Only *to* you, not away?" Finnick asked.

"And not people?" Katniss added.

Rue shook her head. "I can only summon objects I've seen that people *want*. Not living things. My friend was sad her kitty ran away and she wanted him back but I couldn't summon him to me no matter how much she wanted it. I'm sorry."

"It's okay." Katniss took the bow and quiver. "Thank you for the gifts."

Rue smiled.

Finnick twirled his trident experimentally, giving it a few swings. He planted its end into the ground next to him and frowned. "They've been watching us for a while. They know what we fight with."

Katniss looked down at her bow and resisted the urge to throw it away in disgust. She was a hero, and this was her weapon. Pri— Rue needed her to fight.

The pictures of the dead tributes appeared in the fake blue sky.

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The arena was much larger than Katniss first anticipated. She, Finnick, and Rue kept running, but the wall they followed never seemed to circle back to the beginning. The screams were distant, the cannon firing far between, but they never relaxed. The fake sun never set, so they had no idea what time it was or how much had passed. Rue became their sensor, using the part of her Quirk that identified 'wants' to tell if other people were nearby.

"There are people on the other side of the wall." Rue whispered one day— or night. "They're bored. They want to see us but there's no cameras in there."

"There must be tunnels behind the walls." Katniss murmured. "Think there's a door?"

"There has to be. They got us in here somehow." Finnick's gaze flicked upward and his green gaze narrowed to slits. "I have an idea to get them open. They're likely magnetically locked using electricity..."

“And?” Katniss demanded as he trailed off.

“If we cut off that electricity, they should pop open. See that?” he nodded at the sun-like structure at the top of the arena. “I bet that powers the whole thing. We need water. Or a metal wire, maybe? If I have enough of it, I can use it to guide a surge of electricity up there and fry everything.”

“What about those Muttations? Won’t they be let out too?” Rue asked.

“If they are, the designers of this place are worse than stupid.” Finnick muttered.

Days passed.

Or hours.

Or weeks.

More and more cannons went off, and pictures of children flashed in the sky.

Soon, only four were left.

Finnick became frantic, not because he was afraid of Cato, but because he feared the masked monsters would let the Muttations loose if they got tired of waiting for the last kids to die. Rue had tried to summon wire to them but failed, needing to see the object in order to teleport it. Their best chance was back at the weapons cache, which might hold wire meant to be used as a trap.

Finnick offered to go see.

“I’m pretty handy with a trident.” He reminded them with his usual grin.

“But I’m the long-distance fighter.” Katniss argued. “And we don’t know what Cato’s Quirk is.”

“He can transform melee weapons into another melee weapon.” Finnick said promptly. “I saw him do it when...” He trailed off with a grimace. “I can take him if I run into him.”

They argued for another hour, but Katniss reluctantly let him go.

It was exactly what Cato had been waiting for.

One moment, the fake forest was empty.

The next, Cato sprang from the foliage, bold in his attack and assured in his victory because surely these two small, tired, hungry girls stood no chance against him. When he emerged, Katniss did not see a human. She saw a bloodstained face, wild eyes, and a swinging sword that changed into a spear.

He threw it at her and she dodged, bow raising—

Katniss wanted to be a hero.

Heroes did not kill.

But she had been a *hunter* longer than she wanted to be a hero.

Her arrow went straight through Cato’s eye.

He fell with a burst of blood and Katniss stared at him numbly, a scream building in her throat. She

had killed someone. She had killed someone. She had killed someone killed someone killed someone murderer murderer *murderer*—

"Katniss…?"

Rue was behind her.

Rue was behind her, where Cato's spear had flown.

Rue was behind her, where Cato's spear had flown, with the spear sticking out of her chest.

She fell.

Katniss caught her.

She comforted her, rambling a variety of fake reassurances that she would be fine, and everything would be okay.

Rue asked her to sing, so Katniss sang until the light faded from her eyes.

She gently laid Rue down and stood, staring at the tree where she knew a camera was hidden.

She stared until her vision went grey.

The next thing she knew, Finnick was there with wire hoisted over his shoulder. A cut on his arm was bleeding, and his breath came in short pants.

"—not leaving you, Katniss." he was saying. "We're going to get out of here. Together."

Finnick had been crying. Katniss could tell from his voice. She sat on the ground and watched as he connected the wire to the metal wall of the arena. As he struggled with it, numbness slowly faded away, burnt to ashes by rage. Snow and his monsters would lose patience soon. They would release the Muttations on the final two tributes. They were running out of time. Katniss stood and yanked the wire out of his hands, wrapping it around one of her metal arrows. She aimed upwards.

"Dodge."

She released the arrow.

Finnick grabbed her and yanked her back, and her scream for him to *let her go let her be fried let her die for failing* was lost in the crack of electricity.

Electricity shot angrily through the wire and into the fake sun, which sparked and exploded in a fireball.

The arena went dark.

Katniss heard the *whirrr-clink* of deactivating machinery.

The walls did not open.

Finnick cursed. "Damn it. That was our—"

"Hush." Katniss said lowly.

She walked up to the door and banged on it frantically.

“Help!” she cried in the chipper woman’s voice, and Finnick jumped.

Someone on the other side cursed. “Mrs. Lace—? How did you get down there?”

“I fell down here when the shield collapsed, you fool!” Katniss shrieked. “*Get me out of here!*”

The door opened. “Geez lady, give me a sec—”

Katniss tackled the guard and slammed his head into the wall, knocking him out. She abandoned him, ignoring Finnick’s cry to wait, and followed the dark path ahead. She kept to the shadows like Haymitch taught her, footsteps silent on the pretty tile floor. The door to Snow’s office was neatly marked, like he was a businessman and not a monster in human form.

She could hear him shouting angrily into something and shouting more when his lackeys failed to respond to him. Like he was just a businessman and not a monster responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people. Katniss heard Finnick coming up behind her. She ignored him.

She leveled an arrow at the door and spoke in the guard’s voice. “President Snow, I’ve located the missing tributes.”

The door opened. “Then don’t just stand out—”

Katniss released the arrow.

The Pro Heroes found her sitting in the room with Finnick at her side and her bow laid over her knees, her arrow in Snow’s eye.

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She and Finnick were the only survivors. The other twenty-two ‘tributes’ —*children*— were dead.

It was only after the rush of the hospital and questioning and reassurances that she would not be charged with anything and desperate hugs from Prim— their mother was absent, as usual— that Katniss learned why they had been found.

Haymitch.

Her mother did not even realize Katniss had been gone, so Prim was the first to realize she was missing. Gale was the second.

They went to Haymitch together, and he used every contact he had to find Katniss. He made a fuss, he threw around his weight, he called old friends he had not talked to in years. He hollered and drew attention to other missing childrens’ cases from across America, until finally the police and Pro Heroes bothered to *look*.

When Haymitch stumbled into her hospital room, smelling like booze and grumbling to himself, Katniss hugged him. He patted her on the back. She did not thank him. He did not ask to be thanked.

Nothing needed to be said.

Finnick snuck into her hospital room as soon as he could. He perched on the edge of her bed, a bandage on his arm, and offered her a sugar cube. She accepted it as he told her why he wanted to be a Pro Hero. All Might inspired him, like he did so many others, and Finnick wanted to help people back. His reasons were much more selfless than Katniss’s but he called her motivations

selfless anyway. Wanting to support your family was a righteous goal, he claimed.

“Form a team with me after graduation.” he requested. He grinned. “Once we’re big, maybe we’ll go to Japan and thank All Might.”

He may have been joking about that last part.

Katniss still agreed.

She expected not to see Finnick again for a few years and was shocked when he appeared on the east coast with his father, a stern man with leathery sun-kissed skin. She found out why he had moved later.

They were both accepted into Appalachia, free of charge.

Katniss knew it was for the publicity. She did not care that much, since she did not have to pay for it. Her costume, her clothes, and her weapons were all gifts from the school’s sponsor ‘Capitol Hero Committee’. They were one of the oldest Hero sponsors in America, one of the most prestigious.

They were also one of the sponsors who abandoned Haymitch.

They gave her a costume of blues and grays to ‘bring out the color of her eyes’. They gave her a sponsorship, and a small dorm she shared with Finnick. Katniss accepted their gifts and recommendation with a smile.

She did not sign any papers they sent her. She was not a legal adult yet, after all, and could not sign any contracts without a guardian. Her mother was still too distant to care.

She and Gale kept in touch. He called her when teachers were being particularly close-minded, and she called him when the nightmares woke her with a scream on her lips.

After talking it over with Finnick, she asked Gale if he wanted to join their future team.

He immediately accepted.

Katniss was eighteen when she and Finnick graduated from Appalachia.

She attended Gale’s graduation from Cole.

Gale became ‘Galeforce, the Turbulent Hero’.

Finnick called himself ‘Poseidon, the Aquatic Hero’. Katniss told him ‘Fishhead, the Airheaded Hero’ would be more fitting. He laughed and said that was his second choice.

Katniss became ‘Phoenix, the Singing Hero’. It was a bit disingenuous, but *technically* her Quirk had to do with her voice, so it was not a lie. Her hero name and epithet simply did not tell the world what her Quirk actually was. A logical misdirection.

Prim was the one who came up with the name, having gotten the idea from a book where phoenix’s songs helped lift the spirits of people who lost hope. Katniss thought that was a childish idea, but this was Prim. So the name Katniss briefly considered— *Mockingjay*— was left unused, and Phoenix she became.

Just as they agreed, they formed a team. It had no name because Katniss and Gale could think of none and Finnick’s were ridiculous and thus shot down, but the name mattered little to them now.

All that mattered was their goal.

And so Phoenix, Galeforce, and Poseidon began their three-man crusade against human trafficking and underground Quirk fighting rings. They specialized in investigation and rescue missions. Katniss used her hated Quirk to copy the voices of criminals and lure them into traps. She still preferred her bow and used it as often as possible. Finnick used his water-manipulation and trident to take them out, while Galeforce used his air manipulation to do the same.

Interviewers like the famous Caesar Flickman joked that Phoenix was the odd one out. Some theorized she had a secret fire Quirk that was too dangerous to use. To match her 'spitfire personality'. Phoenix ignored them, and let Poseidon distract the interviewers with his charms. He was the face of their team. She stayed in the background, mysterious and aloof.

Just as the hype around the 'Quirk Games Survivors' becoming Pro Heroes died down, they busted a trafficking ring that had been avoiding the Pros for years. Taking down such rings was all the rage as the public demanded more steps be taken.

The Capitol Hero Committee offered to sponsor their efforts. They said their goal was noble, and their work needed more publicity. Human trafficking needed to be stopped, they said, for the good of America.

Finnick was ecstatic.

Katniss was wary.

Gale was pissed.

He ranted about them being sellouts, about them becoming part of a corrupt system. He accused them of becoming greedy like so many other heroes. He ignored how they were not making enough money, and they had to make a choice: get put in the Capitol's pocket and continue to save people, or lose everything and save no one.

Katniss tried to explain.

Finnick tried to explain.

Gale was hearing none of it.

"They're the type of people we should be taking down!" he shouted. "*We deserve justice*."

It was then that Katniss realized he did not want to save those that were kidnapped; he wanted the kidnappers to face punishment. There *was* a difference, and although it did not matter to Gale, it mattered to Katniss.

Galeforce and Phoenix's falling out made national news. The trinity became two less than a year after they formed, and Katniss did not mind.

She carefully looked over every contract before she and Finnick signed it. She told Finnick what changes needed to be made and watched as he charmed their lovely sponsors into better and better deals.

She and Finnick rose through the United States Hero Billboards like blazing stars. Poseidon's popularity was almost unbelievable, and he stopped at Number Four. Phoenix settled just outside of the Top Ten at Number Twelve since she was— as one of her managers at the Capitol said— "just a bit cold and unapproachable".

By the end of it, Katniss had a nice house she shared with Finnick, Prim, her mother, and Prim's stupid and annoying no-longer-stray cat. She had enough money to keep the lights on and the water running. Best of all, the Capitol did not and never could own them without legal repercussions.

That was enough for Katniss.

Until one day when she was twenty, she caught Finnick downstairs, drunk and crying.

It was that day he told her the truth. He told her what the Committee made him do in exchange for their sponsorship. Finnick was not free like Katniss. In fact, he had given himself up for her. To keep *her* safe, to keep *her* happy, to keep *her* free in exchange for him. Because while the highest ups at the Capitol loved money, they loved pretty things more.

Katniss did not scream at him. She did not yell at him for doing this for her. She wanted to, but she was not so cold she would shove a drowning man further down. Instead she hugged him and whispered that it was not his fault. It was not his fault. It was ***theirs***—

Gale was right. Partly right. We shouldn't have—

She convinced Finnick he did not have to live like this. When he tried to protest, she asked why he expected her not to help someone in need. That got through to him faster than any argument, and Finnick contacted an old friend of his the next day, a hacker only known as "Beetee". Katniss never met him face to face, and she did not ask to.

They worked for the Capitol.

They busted rings and traffickers wide open and left ashes in their wakes.

They saved people.

They waited.

Katniss was twenty-one when Finnick said he had enough evidence to come forward.

Two days later, they went on a mission.

The villains were expected.

The Muttations were not.

She watched, screaming as she pounded her fists against thick, unbreakable glass, but Poseidon was on the other side. There was nothing she could do.

So she watched as the Muttations tore Finnick apart.

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The nation mourned for Poseidon, but Katniss mourned for Finnick.

She kept doing hero work, kept saving people, kept arresting criminals. She slowly separated herself from the Capitol, relying on herself and a 'won't take no for an answer *I'm not losing you too'* Haymitch. She used everything he taught her and slowly wiggled her way out of the Capitol's grasp, because she read their contracts and knew how to jump through flaming hoops unscathed. She went to another meeting with President Coin and listened to her hints that Phoenix really should remain with them because they could give Prim scholarships and invest in her future.

And in a moment of weakness, Katniss thought about it, because this was not about her future, but Prim's.

Prim found her downstairs one night, staring at a cup of alcohol she did not drink. She took the booze from her sister's hands and held them instead.

"Are you trying to do the right thing?"

Katniss looked at her, sharply. "What?"

Prim gave her a look she always gave to that stupid cat when he got into mischief. "You know what I mean. Are you trying to do the right thing?"

Katniss realized she knew. Prim knew about the Capitol. She knew about their games. She might even know what they did to Finnick. When had her sister become aware of the darker side of the world? Katniss thought about her sister's question as she glanced at the full cup of alcohol she would not drink.

"Yes." she realized. "I'm trying to do the right thing."

Prim squeezed her hands. "Then do it."

Her blessing was all the motive Katniss needed to keep going.

The next day, she rejected the Capitol's offers in more polite terms than Haymitch would have and walked out with no intention of ever returning.

She should have realized Prim's mentioning was not a manipulation tactic.

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In her spare time between missions, and less-attended parties and charity balls, Katniss helped Prim sell vegetables on the corner of a busy street, and gave autographs with a practiced smile. One day, Gale called her and they tentatively mended the broken bridges between them. He asked to meet, and Katniss agreed.

They would meet at Prim's little vegetable stand on the corner of a busy street, where she sold her precious plants and Katniss gave autographs with a practiced, aloofly-mysterious smile.

Gale was late.

Katniss checked her phone— a few models out of date, bought with her own money, not the Capitol's— and rose from her seat next to Prim.

"Looks like he's a no-show."

"Maybe he got held up." Prim mentioned.

She was seventeen now, on the verge of adulthood, but the back of her shirt still stuck out like a duck's tail. She wanted to become a nurse, and she would do it, Katniss knew, but she should probably learn how to tuck her shirt in first. Katniss tucked it in for her out of habit and stretched, glancing at the time again. 8:30.

"It's getting dark. I can call him from home—" Since she did not have his new number programmed into her cell considering their… recent distance. "—and see where he is. You should probably start packing up."

“Yes, Katniss.” Prim obediently started putting fruit away.

A commotion down the street had Katniss on guard, bow in her hands. She drifted towards the noise and saw two men squabbling, their argument growing increasingly swear-word filled. She saw the crackle of lighting in one man’s hands.

Katniss sighed. “Duty calls.”

She eliminated the lightning man’s threat with a Quirk-nullifying arrow— one of the few she had left— before he could do more than spark. The other man noticed her and put his hands up, the flames in his fists fading away. Katniss walked up to him, ignoring the whispers and squeals that *Phoenix is here.*

“Do I need to give you the ‘using Quirks in public’ speech or can we all just go home?” she asked dryly. “Quite frankly, I’m tired and I want to go to bed.”

The men mumbled like chastised children caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Having been called by onlookers, two police rushed in and they meekly accepted arrest. Katniss took her arrow back with a nod and returned it to her quiver.

The ground shuddered so briefly Katniss thought she had imagined it.

A nearby building rattled and she saw dust fall from the bricks.

She spotted figures fighting inside a window and stepped forward.

Glass shattered, and something flew out into the open air.

Katniss saw a glint of metal and bright red wires.

She ran towards the little vegetable stand at the corner of the street.

“*PRIM!*”

Prim looked her way, a box of tomatoes in her hands.

The bomb exploded, and Katniss’s sister burned in front of her.

A thousand screams built in Katniss’s throat and glass around her shattered.

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After she recovered from the burns she received— which the doctors made sure left not a single scar or blemish because she must look *beautiful and tragic and perfect*— Katniss was released from the hospital and buried her little sister. The woman that gave birth to her and Prim did not attend the funeral.

The tragedy was everywhere she looked. On the news, online, whispered in the streets. Civilians looked at her with pity, others with scorn, because what kind of hero couldn’t save her own family? The epithet ‘Phoenix, the Singing Hero’ became a thing of the past, with the much more callous ‘Phoenix, the Mourning Hero’ or ‘Phoenix, the Girl on Fire’ taking its place.

She found out from a rather persistent reporter that the villain had been fighting Galeforce. The villain had thrown the bomb out the window but Galeforce lunged for his enemy instead of using his Quirk to lift it away from the street below. When the reporter demanded her thoughts on the subject, Katniss did not say a word. She did not answer the phone when Gale called.

Instead she called Beetee, who owed her and Finnick both for getting him out of a sticky situation with a vengeful gang.

Two months after Prim's funeral, the Capitol Hero Committee found itself at the core of a scandal, their every misdeed exposed and splattered across the internet for the whole world to see.

Indisputable evidence was found that their President— one Alma Coin— was involved in the Quirk Games and other trafficking operations. The Committee played both sides as they controlled both heroes and villains, supplying them both and sending them against each other for profit. Worst of all, even more damning evidence was found that they had part in the deaths of Poseidon and Primrose Everdeen. Katniss did not want to know if Galeforce was a willing conspirator or an unwilling pawn, so she stopped looking.

Alma Coin was dead when the police came to arrest her. The news claimed it was suicide.

Katniss wondered how Coin managed to shoot herself with an arrow while standing atop a balcony.

The Capitol Hero Committee collapsed in a week, its reputation in shambles.

American Hero Society was in an uproar, scrambling to keep itself from collapsing too as Pro Heroes across the country distanced themselves from the Capitol. Most corporations like the Capitol suffered heavy losses as working for such institutions became frowned upon and most Pro Heroes became independent or worked to set up their own agencies.

But the machine that was Hero Society would not be stopped by a simple scandal. Things would go back to the way they were in a few years, especially with the newly-redeemed Number One of America, Captain Celebrity, pushing for change. Maybe it would be better. Maybe it would be worse. Maybe it would be the same like nothing ever happened.

Katniss did not care.

Hero Society would recover, but the Capitol Hero Committee was in ruins.

She left Buttercup with Haymitch and left the States three days after the news broke.

And so Phoenix departed to a different land, leaving ashes in her wake.

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Katniss Everdeen was still the ripe old age of twenty-one— almost twenty-two— when she became an underground hero in Japan. A *real* one, not the farce she had been in America.

She was Mockingjay, the shadowy hero that ruthlessly hunted criminals and pinned them to walls with her arrows, or tied them up like struggling gifts and left them wiggling and swearing— if they were conscious— in front of police stations. She left her bird-like mark on each of them and received payment, and those few in the business that knew about her existence whispered she was more like a bounty hunter than a Pro Hero.

She did not care. She did not care what they thought of her. She did not care how much money she made. She did not care how many criminals she caught. She had a small apartment, enough money to keep the lights on and the water running, and she was out of the Capitol's pocket.

There was nothing else for her to care about.

Gone was the fancy, pretty costume the Capitol gave her. Gone were the equally fancy and pretty hairstyles and clothes and shoes. Her costume was her own, a simple black body armor with a mask that covered her whole face, her dark hair in a long braid. A lightweight chest plate covered her torso and guards shielded her forearms, matching the black bow and quiver that were slung over her back. A golden emblem in the shape of a bird was the only splash of color on her outfit, placed over her heart.

She worked alone, avoiding the spotlight, attending no ceremonies or parties, making no friends, making no bonds.

Until one day, a Winged Hero dropped into her life.

More accurately, she dropped into his.

Fighting on top of a building was a stupid idea. Mockingjay called herself smart, but she followed a villain five stories up anyway. He hit her with a repulsion blast as she hit him with a Quirk-nullifying arrow.

Her fall down was much quicker than the climb.

As air rushed around her and she hurtled towards the ground, Mockingjay heard Haymitch shouting at her for not paying attention to her surroundings. She wondered if the Japanese Hero Society would contact him since the woman that gave birth to her would not know or even care where she was.

Someone caught her before she could go splat on the pavement.

“It’s okay! I’ve got you.” a young voice barely on the cusp of adulthood said cheerfully. “I’ll bring you down, okay?”

Mockingjay felt nothing but air beneath her feet so she begrudgingly stayed still until they were back on solid ground. A rustle of wings caught her attention and her savior landed, revealing gold locks and red feathers. Mockingjay resisted the urge to groan aloud. It was Hawks, the new rookie hero causing a stir in Hero Society. Young and ambitious, he had already opened his own Hero Agency and was rising fast.

Too fast, Mockingjay thought bitterly. *How long until Icarus gets too close to the sun and falls?*

Hawks did not notice her scowl, too lost in the thrill of the save. “Wow, that was close. That could’ve gone so badly. You were almost a— Oh, wait. That’s bad to say. Right. Ahem.” He cleared his throat. “Are you okay—?” Golden— bright childish joyful *naive*— eyes locked onto her face and went round with excitement. “Ohmygosh you’re Mockingjay! I saved *Mockingjay*!”

Dancing and fluttering in excitement was not the most polite thing to do considering what nearly happened, but he had the gall to do it. Mockingjay could only stare in dull annoyance.

“You’ve heard of me.” she said flatly. “Great.”

“You’re so cool!” Hawks squealed. His feet lifted off the ground as he flew circles around her. “Is it true you brought down the Solarflare Gang by yourself? And were you really behind the rescue of all those Quirk users in that trafficking ring near Yokohama? Oh, and did you really punch Captain Celebrity and knock him out—?”

He paused in midair, eyes on her emblem, wings flicking, and Mockingjay had a *very* bad feeling. He leaned close, smiling and bright *like Finn*— buzzing with excitement.

“Hey, you’re a bird-themed hero too! Do you want to join my Agency?” he asked brightly.

“I work alone.” Mockingjay said coldly.

She stalked off to retrieve the captured villain from the top of the building.

To his credit, the— *idealistic, naive, joyful, he’s going to be **crushed***— annoying kid did not follow her.

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Mockingjay had no intention of seeing Hawks again. She was an underground hero, and he was the rookie in the spotlight, making waves as he rose through the ranks faster than a speeding bullet. But instead of never seeing him again, she somehow *kept running into him*. The odds were never in Mockingjay’s favor, so she suspected it was dumb luck that they crossed paths so much. After a while, she swore his cheerful voice would haunt her nightmares along with Rue and Finnick and Prim’s.

“Hi, Mockingjay!”

“Mockingjay, wait up!”

“Want to join my Agency? It’s called ‘Hawks Hero Agency’ but we all call it ‘The Kettle’. *The Kettle*, get it? Cause that’s what a group of wild hawks is called? Shoot, I explained the joke. Miruko says I’m not supposed to do that. My handl— the people I grew up with were all a bunch of stick-in-the-muds so I haven’t exactly had practice being... *Anyway*, we could use someone like you.”

“I brought some chicken. Want some? I have enough to share.”

“You know, you remind me of Miruko. She wants to work alone all the time too… You should be friends! I can introduce you.”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“What’s your favorite food? Mine’s chicken.”

“I found a place that has that stew you like.”

“So I *might* have had some of my people look into that gang you’re trying to bust… in that mission I totally don’t know about...”

“I had my support department make these cool arrows for you. So maybe you can be less stabby-shooty. Only if you want to though. It’d be weird if you weren’t stabby-shooty. That’s just who you are. Am I rambling again? Oops.”

“Do you want to go on a mission together?”

Mockingjay tried to ignore him, but it was like trying to neglect a wide-eyed and starving stray puppy following her down the street. Worse, the puppy had huge, hopeful golden eyes that showed he thought maybe, just *maybe* this person would keep him this time. Or at least tolerate him for a little while. All Hawks needed was a wagging tail and the mental image would be complete. Every grunt and curt “no”— which slowly became real but still rather short answers— encouraged Hawks to linger, and she had no clue why.

It was *not* because he could tell she was lonely, just like she could tell he desperately wanted a friend.

She was *fine* with being alone and he had this 'Miruko' person to be friends with.

He did not need her.

Eventually Hawks grew bold enough to walk next to her instead of flitting in and zooming away like a baby chick showing its mother it could fly, rambling on and asking her if she wanted to join his Hero Agency. Mockingjay was forced— yes, it was *forced*, she did *not* do this willingly she did *not*— to meet him on a rooftop so the media would not see them and wonder who Mockingjay was. She could have offered her apartment as a meeting place but felt uncomfortable at the thought of him seeing the small, lonely room she called home, even though she knew he lived in an even smaller rundown apartment.

They met nearly every night— at least once a week— until it became a tradition. Just him and her sitting on a rooftop as he rambled and she supplied him with short, snarky answers. Eventually the anger building in her gut exploded and she snapped at him that he needed to stay away from her because association with her could ruin his reputation.

Golden eyes had blinked at her in confusion. "But you're a great Hero." Hawks said simply. "You help so many people that others wouldn't. You're amazing."

His voice was so genuine, Mockingjay could almost fool herself into thinking it was true.

It was that day she realized that Hawks had done something unforgivable.

He made her *care*.

He had somehow wormed her way into her cold heart.

To his credit, she may have let him.

Hawks reminded her so much of Finnick it hurt. He had the same golden locks, the same easy smile, the same natural grace and charisma. He was bright like the sun, just like Finnick and Pri— and Mockingjay *knew* his light would be snuffed out someday. He was so bright and young and beautiful and though he was barely eighteen people *noticed*. It made her stomach churn and one day her self-isolated little world wasn't so isolated. Her priorities *shifted*. She could not simply let him go.

It was not her business, but during their meetings she prodded once or twice or many times, just to be sure he wasn't being used like Finnick. He was young ~~— He was the same age Pri'm would have been —~~ and pretty, and the Hero Public Safety Commission had their fingers dug so deeply into his wings there would be blood if they ever let go. She did not flat out say it, but he eventually caught on to what she worried about and assured her he was fine.

"I have to model clothes, but that's it. No disturbing stuff."

Mockingjay instantly knew he was hiding something. She heard the lies in his voice. "No one's giving you problems or making unwanted advances towards you?"

Hawks avoided her eyes and laughed uncomfortably. "'Unwanted advances'? Don't you think you're being a bit script-driven—?"

"Hawks." Mockingjay interrupted sternly. "This is serious."

“I… I know.” His wings pressed against his body, making his already-lithe frame seem even smaller. “There is this one Commission guy who is a bit… *creepy* but I’m good at avoiding him.”

Mockingjay’s grey eyes narrowed. “Define ‘creepy’.”

“He’s convinced I’m secretly a girl.” Hawks admitted. “He says ‘guys can’t be that pretty’ and wants me to prove I’m male. He keeps trying to catch me when I’m undressed.” Mockingjay must have looked murderous because he stumbled over his next words in his rush to get them out. “He hasn’t done anything! I haven’t let him. He’s one of my handl— managers but I’ve been able to avoid him or only be near him when there are other people around.” He rubbed his bare chin ruefully. “I’d hoped to grow some type of beard to dissuade him but it’s not going so well.”

Mockingjay was silent. Looking at Hawks, she could *almost* see how the man could think those things. At— the young, young, *young* age of— eighteen, Hawks was rather androgynous. He had a round, friendly face, thick eyelashes and markings almost like eye liner, and hints of baby fat clinging to his comparatively small frame. Mockingjay could picture him growing, but not much. At most, she guessed he would grow to her height of five feet and seven and three-quarters inches.

That was no exc— No. *There was* no excuse for his handler’s actions. Not even close.

Her fingers twitched.

“Please don’t shoot him.” Hawks mumbled.

Mockingjay did not reassure him she wouldn’t. “Promise you’ll tell me if anything happens.”

Hawks hesitated, but reluctantly nodded. “I will.”

A few weeks later, Hawks was disturbingly quiet when he settled beside her on the rooftop. His shoulders were hunched, his wings pressed close to his body, and he huddled in his coat as if he were trying to hide in it. Mockingjay said nothing, waiting in silence, until he finally found his voice and spoke.

“He convinced my superiors I need more martial arts training. He’s my teacher. One on one lessons.”

Mockingjay did not need to hear more.

She ruffled Hawks’s golden hair and told him she’d take care of it.

She went home.

She called Beetee and he guided her through one of the Hero Public Safety Commission’s facilities as she used their voices to waltz right through security.

The ‘creep’ that Hawks had spoken of was exposed within the week. Mockingjay had *no idea* how the reports of his sexual misconduct got leaked onto the internet. Truly, it was a *shock* since she had *no* part in it. Naturally, a *conveniently* juicier scandal popped up to distract the media and the incident was swept under the rug to preserve the Commission’s image. Still, her goal was achieved. The perpetrator was quietly fired and arrested without a fuss.

Hawks hugged her the next time she saw him.

She did not shove him away.

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Months went by.

Mockingjay was twenty-three.

Her father had been gone for nearly twenty years.

Rue had been gone for seven.

Finnick and Prim had been gone for two.

Hawks was nineteen, the age Prim and Rue would have been if they'd—

Before he turned that young, *young* age, he was already in the Top Ten.

Now he was the Number Three Hero in Japan.

It was his 'acceptance' speech— that was more like a snide, accusatory mockery of one— that made Mockingjay look twice and realize he was not just sunshine like Finnick and Prim.

He was also like her, because he was a *fighter*.

He ripped every bit of independence and individuality he could from the Commission, rebelling in small but vicious ways that the Commission could not protest without seeming unreasonable. He named himself 'Hawk*s*' instead of 'Hawk' like they wanted. He wore baggy clothes that covered his well-toned and marketable body, and although he modeled he refused to do a swimsuit photo shoot for Heroes Illustrated and instead went to a fundraiser for charity, because the Commission could not object to that.

He could not remember his birth name— because only the Winged Hero 'Hawks' mattered to the Commission and public so he had no use for a civilian identity— but he revealed his age, birthday, and hometown in an interview when they wanted him to keep it quiet for the "*mystique factor*". He admitted he came from an impoverished, neglectful home and that his parents were not good people. He back-talked and pointed out heroes' flaws, *including* his own, and called his coworkers out when they put on a show for popularity points instead of being genuine. He stomped on the mold of the perfect hero they tried to bury him in and spread his wings as much as he could while in his glimmering golden cage.

She wanted to free him.

More importantly, she wanted to free him *without* the losses she suffered in order to take her old superiors down.

Mockingjay met Hawks on their usual rooftop, a bucket of chicken at her side. He landed beside her, noticed the offering, and happily took it.

"Uh oh." he said as he chowed down on a drumstick. "You brought food. Am I in trouble?"

"It's to celebrate your promotion." Mockingjay said dryly.

Hawks's shoulders slumped. "Yeah. Top three. Woo."

"You aren't happy."

"No *duh*. Of course I'm not." Hawks flopped onto his back with a groan. "I would've been content

with the top twenty or thirty but that wasn't good enough for the Commission. I have to be the best. Or the best with Endeavor and All Might there."

Mockingjay's fingers curled. She thought of Finnick and his tears. She thought of Haymitch and his misery. She thought of the Capitol Hero Committee, and the ashes she left them as. She had no doubt the Hero Public Safety Commission had their own skeletons and cover ups, and she realized if Hawks continued going as he was, he would be just another gravestone before he hit age thirty. Someone needed to stop that from happening.

"Hawks." He looked at her. "...Is that position at your Agency still open?"

Hawks's smile was bright like Finnick's. It was hopeful like Rue's. It was naive like Prim's. "Yeah. You interested?"

Mockingjay hummed noncommittally. "If I work with you... I want you to promise me something." Grey eyes locked with gold. "Don't die on me."

Hawks did not laugh. Nor did he smile. Instead he studied her with sharp golden eyes that had already seen the darkness hidden behind Hero Society's light. "That's a hefty promise. I'm not sure I can keep it, but I'll try."

Katniss believed him.

More importantly than that, she would do whatever it took to make him keep his promise.

"Then I accept."

Hawks would not be Icarus.

He would not be a Phoenix, forced to burn to ashes before being forged anew.

If *they*— Villains, the Commission, or Hero Society as a whole— tried to burn him, Katniss would make sure *they burned first*.

End Notes

So. How this story came to be is a weird tale. I was writing "For Their Sakes" and realized I needed a character for Hawks's Hero Agency so I (half-heartedly) considered making an OC. But then I read "Hunger Games" again and went "Hey, why not use Katniss?" I brainstormed ideas on how to adapt her into the MHA world, figuring out a Quirk, an adapted backstory, why she wanted to be a hero, etc. and tada, this one-shot was born. It could have been a full length story but I decided to keep it to snapshots of Katniss's life to keep things simple. I hope you liked it.

Obviously I played around with ages, roles, etc but this is an "alternate universe" or whatever you want to call it, so yeah, things are different.

Just so you know: "For Their Sakes" is not a crossover. I am simply using Katniss as a (what is the word?) "transplanted" character to fill a role, and this serves as her (hero) origin. You'll see more of her there.

Hope you enjoyed!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!